

BUCKFASTLEIGH EAST URBAN DISTRICT.

ANNUAL MEDICAL REPORT FOR 1896.

In this, my third annual report, I give the birth and death rates, calculated on a population of 2,750, as the increase during the past 35 years has been about 350.

BIRTHS.—37 males, 22 females, total 59; giving a rate of 21·45 per thousand. Compared with last year there is an increase of 9 males, and a decrease of 4 females. Total increase 5.

DEATHS.—These number 36—giving a rate of 13·09 per 1,000. This compares favourably with last year, when the rate was 16·77 per 1,000. Six deaths occurred under 1 year; two from 1 to 5 years of age; three from 5 to 15; one from 15 to 25; ten from 25 to 65; and fourteen above 65. Three deaths were caused by infectious disease.

ZYMOTIC DISEASES.—Four cases of scarlatina were notified during the year, two in Buckfastleigh and two in Buckfast. The origin could not be traced in either case. Three were treated in their own homes, full antiseptic precautions being taken, with the result that it did not spread. The fourth was promptly removed to the Torquay Isolation Hospital. One case of typhoid fever was notified in January, and 8 between June 5th and August 14th, two proving fatal. I carefully tested the water which the patients had been in the habit of drinking and found it in every case quite pure. The first case was not a severe one, the patient living in Jordan-street, some 200 yards or more from where the other cases subsequently occurred. In my monthly report I stated:—"Collection of dirty water outside backdoor caused by blocking of gutter under the step into the garden. They only use water from town supply. No pump." Six other cases lived round a distinct centre of infection—a deposit stench trap intended only for surface water, but which was made the receptacle for every kind of house refuse; when it was emptied the stench was intolerable. In addition to that a serious defect was found in the w.c., attached to a house where three of the inmates were attacked—a large hole in the pan above the trap, through which the night soil escaped and accumulated under the woodwork. These two sources of infection were at once removed. The last case occurred in a house a few yards from the others, though not in the same court; the drains from the w.c., and from a cesspit in the adjoining property, empty into the brook close to the garden gate; the man (one of the two fatal cases) had been frequently exposed to the effluvium while dipping up water to water his garden; there was not enough water in the brook to carry away, or even cover the sewerage.

DRAINAGE.—The brook referred to runs behind a long street and takes the drainage from 63 houses, and a similar state of things exists in other parts of the town. It is impossible to alter all this until a sewerage scheme is carried out, and it is urgently needed. As things are now, there is a risk of an outbreak of typhoid whenever we have a spell of dry weather.

CLOSET.—I have inspected a large number during the year. I find that they are much better kept than at my first inspection. Much further improvement cannot be expected until the sewerage and water schemes are carried out.

COTTAGE ACCOMMODATION is slowly increasing, but many more houses must be built before the existing overcrowding can be completely remedied.

ISOLATION TENT.—An isolation tent has been purchased and is ready to be put up at a few hours' notice. But I find there is a strong objection to its use in the minds of many people. In any case it would only be of use during the summer months, and the necessity for a more substantial building ought not to be lost sight of.

DAIRIES AND COWSHEDS.—All the dairies are in good condition, and cowsheds have been improved since my last inspection, but cubic space is below what is required by bye-laws in most instances.

HENRY UBSDELL,

Medical Officer of Health.

